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THE
Great Mystery
OF
PROVIDENCE.

OR,

The various Methods of GOD in
Ordering and Over-ruling the Actions of
Wicked Men and Devils to great and glorious
Purposes. With the Vindication of his Holiness therein.

BEING

The Substance of several SERMONS preached
by the Reverend, Judicious, and Orthodox Divine

Mr. GEORGE GIFFORD,

Late Minister of St. Dunstan in the East, London.

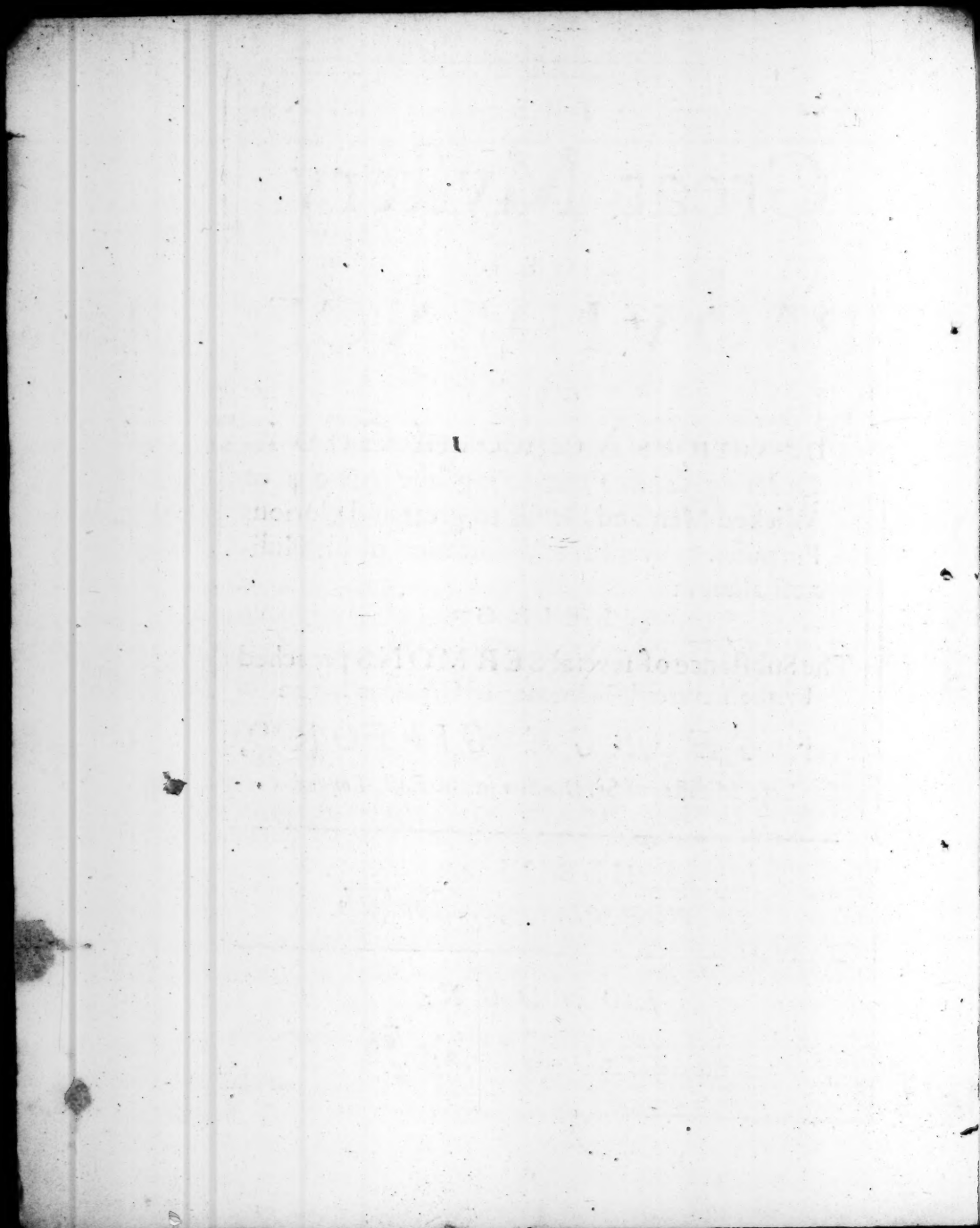
HEB. XI. 4.

He being dead, yet speaketh.

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TO THE
READER.

NEXT to the Knowledge and Belief of a God and the Essentials of Religion, there is not any Truth of greater moment or more needful to be rightly known of all persons, than this before us, namely, How far the holy and righteous God is, or may be concerned in, or make use of the evil Actions of wicked Men and Devils, without any Impeachment of his Righteousness and Holiness, or making him the Author or Approver of Sin; the Ignorance or Misunderstanding of which, in all Ages, has exceedingly promoted Atheism and Irreligion among the Wicked of the World, who take occasion from hence to think and say in their Hearts (if not with their Mouths) either there is no God, or He is not a Righteous and a Holy God. And the Consideration of the Prosperity of Wicked Men in their Evil Actions, and the Suffering of Good Men thereby, have been an occasion of stumbling and offence to holy Persons, as we find in Scripture. The Truth of this matter lies in the middle, between two Extreams, as the Author hereof has informed us, who was a very Judicious and Orthodox Divine, of great Note in this City. I doubt not but the Reader, if he brings a serious Mind to know Truth, and not to cavil at it, will find this matter so plainly and truly, tho' briefly stated and determined, as to answer all material Objections of Atheistical and Prophane Gainsayers, and such as are wise in their own Conceit, and to be a Foundation to good Men of Patience and Resignation to the Will of God in all Sufferings and Calamities, publick and private. from evil Men, and instead of murmuring and repining, will cause them to adore that Infinite Wisdom and Goodness

To the READER.

ness, that can bring Good out of Evil, and over-rule all the Sins and Follies of Men, to the greater manifestation of his own glorious Attributes, and the Good and Welfare of his Church. These Sermons having been calculated only for a popular Auditory, the Reader must expect no other Eloquence than that of the Apostle Paul's great plainness of Speech, which best becomes Divinity, and especially the weighty Subject before us. Therefore I shall conclude with only one Request to the Reader, That he will peruse these Lines with the same Spirit which the Author declares he had in the delivery of them, namely, with a holy Fear and Trembling, and then I doubt not but he will receive that benefit and advantage by them as shall give abundant cause to bless GOD for them, which is the Chief End of the Publisher,

J. D.

Advertisement.

A Discourse upon Usury, or lending Money for Encrease : (occasion'd by Mr. David Jones's late Farewel-Sermon) proving by undeniable Arguments the Lawfulness thereof, and answering his plausible Objections from Scripture-Counsels and Fathers against it. Published at the request of several judicious and sober Christians, for the satisfaction of all such as have or may be concerned in this matter of so general and weighty importance. Printed for Sam. Crouch, at the Corner of Popes-head-Alley next Cornhill.

GEN.

GEN. xlv. 8.

---So that it was not you that sent me hither,
but GOD.

THE joyful discovery of *Joseph* to his Brethren, I have already spoken of out of this Chapter, after his rough treating of them: after so many Fears and Dangers, at last the Sun breaks out from these Clouds, and then he cries out, *I am Joseph*. And there I handled, that this was an Emblem of God's dealing with his own People; He leads them at first into crooked Paths, but then after all these Tempests and Storms there will be Joy and Peace at the last. And I proposed to you, how that after some great Affliction, but above all Spiritual Desertion, when God has shewn himself a long time as it were an Enemy to his People, at last he shines forth, and saith, *I am your God and Saviour*. The second thing I have handled, is, *Joseph's* pardoning and loving his Brethren, that had so barbarously sold him to be a Slave: he is now so far from revenging himself of them, that he loves and embraces them. And upon this I handled that high and excellent Duty of loving and forgiving those that injure us; that the true and noblest way of revenging Injuries, was, by *overcoming Evil with Good*. I come now to the next thing, and that is, the Arguments *Joseph* makes use of to comfort his Brethren that were so overcome with Shame and Fear. He doth three times repeat it; the first is drawn from the Providence of God in working this great thing, *It was not you that sent me hither, but God*; as if he should have said, Do not look any more upon Second Causes: It is true, it was a Fault in you who sold me, but look upon the good Hand and Providence of God in it, *God sent me before you, and it was not you that sent me hither, but God*. This so frequent inculcating of it, was to raise up them, and also us, to a serious Contemplation, how all the Evils of Men

are order'd by the wise Providence of God to good purposes. In this action God and they both worked together; they *sold Joseph*, and God *sent* him for Good, for the preservation of God's Church in *Jacob's* Family. I shall, by God's assistance, fix here for some time upon the Providence of God in over-ruling the Actions of wicked Men.

First, Here is an *Ingeniosa Charitas*; see how often *Joseph* repeats his acknowledgments of the Hand and Providence of God in this matter. I observe there is nothing will make us more willing to forgive them that have done us any Injury, than to look up to the Providence of God, and refer all to that: we are apt to look to Instruments and Second Causes, and not think of the Hand of God in them.

Secondly, God *sent me before you, to preserve you a Posterity, and to save your Lives by a great Deliverance*; and it was not you that *sent me hither, but God*. I observe here God's gracious Providence and Care over his Church and Children, so long before providing for their Safety. It is one of the most excellent Observations of God's Providence towards his Children in the whole Scripture, When God intended to bring a most dreadful Famine upon the World (in which *Jacob* and his Family might probably have perished) yet God made a provision for him and them 20 years before-hand, in such a way as *Jacob* and *Joseph* never thought of; He sends *Joseph* 20 years before-hand to be a Harbinger for his Church and People: God, after a secret and ineffable manner, does order all Events so, that at last they tend to the good of his Church; as we find several cross Providences in this History of *Joseph* and his Brethren, yet they all contribute to this good end and conclusion. This should teach us, in all the Difficulties and Troubles that befall God's Church, and when we know not what will become of us, to resign up all to the Providence of God, he will take care and provide for us by such means as we little dream of.

Thirdly, I shall treat of the Providence of God in governing and over-ruling the Actions of wicked Men, *It was not you that sent me hither, but God*; and yet certainly, Beloved, they had a hand in the Action. I observe from hence, it was God that over-ruled their Counsels; all the Actions of sinful Men, yea, of the De-

Devils themselves, are ordered by a strange but yet most wise Council of God himself. It is a point of great concern to resolve how the Righteousness and Holiness of God can consist in ordering and ruling of the Sins of Mankind. There is a great Difference among Interpreters, how to reconcile the Providence of God in the Actions of sinful Men with his Holiness, Justice, and the Liberty and Freedom of Mankind. Therefore,

First, I shall demonstrate from this Example, That all the Actions of Men, even their sinful Actions, are under the Providence of God, they *sold Joseph*, and God *sent* him.

Secondly, I shall enquire what Efficiency or Concurrence the holy God hath in the sinful Actions of Ungodly Men.

Thirdly, I shall enquire into the Ends of such Orderings, how God works, and ordains the Actions of wicked Men to Ends beyond what they desired or designed. This is a point that I look upon as most seasonable, to be well weighed and considered under our present Disquiets and Fears.

I shall begin with the first, That the Actions of Men and Devils, both good and bad, yea, all the Sins of wicked Men and Devils, are under the government of the Providence of God. (1.) I shall prove the point by four or five places of Scripture, the first shall be drawn from those general places in Scripture, that ascribe every thing to the Will and Providence of God; so *Psal. 35. 6. Whatever the Lord pleased, that did he in Heaven and in Earth.* There is nothing comes to pass without the Will of God, *Dan 4. 35. He doth according to his will in all the armies of Heaven and Earth, and none can stay his hand. Voluntas Dei est omnium rerum necessitas.* There are many things, it is true, that are contrary to the preceptive part of God's Will, but there is nothing comes to pass without the Providence of God, or against what he would have done: yea, the Devils themselves, when they most cross the preceptive Will of God, they do then most fulfill the Will of his Providence; *There are many devices in the heart of man, but the counsel of the Lord that shall stand.* Whatever designs Men or Devils may have, yet he tells us, they all act but according to the providential Will of God. The (2.) Head is this, That such Actions as are brought to pass by wicked Men, are said to be done by the

eternal Councel and Ordination of God, they are the Contrivance of God's Decrees: it was so in this case of *Joseph*, God had decreed *Joseph's* advancement in *Egypt*, yet this was not brought to pass without the Sin of his Brethren. I will give you one Instance in Scripture, That Action that proved the greatest Blessing to Mankind of any in the World, yet was brought to pass by the greatest Villany in the Instruments that ever was in the World, I mean the Suffering of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, *Acts 2. 23. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands crucified and slain.* In the same Action there was the Wickedness and Envy of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, there was the Villany and Treachery of *Judas*, in betraying of him, yet he saith all this was done *by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.* So *Acts 4. 27, 28. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do what-soever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.* This is a singular Comfort, that all things come to pass not according to wicked Mens Counsels, but according to what God doth determine. (3.) Wicked Men, when they do the unjustest actions, yet they are said to be the Instruments of God's Providence, to execute his Counsels, his Designs, and Purposes; I will give you some few of them: *Isa. 10. 5. God's Church were to be invaded by the Assyrians, O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation; I will send him against an hypocritical nation.* Well, look to the 7th Verse, *Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth he think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations.* That is, this proud Prince thinks of nothing of God's Providence and Purposes in this matter, his design is to gratifie his Pride, and Revenge, and Covetousness, but God Almighty gives way to it for other holy and wise ends. And again *v. 15. Shall the ax boast it self against him that heweth therewith? or, shall the saw magnifie it self against him that shaketh it?* There is a great emphasis in these words, to shew, that wicked Men and their Actions are all in the Hands of God, as the Ax and the Saw in the Hand of the Workman. (4.) That even when wicked Men go about wicked Actions, God is said to stir them up to it: so in
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this Instance of *Joseph*, and in that *Isa. 10. 6.* God is said to send the *Affyrians* against an hypocritical Nation, to punish and chastise them. So 2 *Sam. 12. 11.* you see there (Beloved) God threatens to raise up evil against David in his own house, that is, by the Rebellion of his Son *Absalom*, and his Villany and Insolence against his Father's Wives and Concubines; but was God the cause of this Wickedness in *Absalom*? No, but *Absalom* having these Lusts in him, God permitted him to exercise them for the punishment of David's Sin. So 2 *Sam. 16. 11.* *Shimei* doth unjustly revile David, but saith David, *The Lord hath sent Shimei to curse David*; but this was to punish David for his former Sins: *Psal. 105. 23.* it is said, *He turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people, and to deal subtilly with his servants*; He made use of their Sin for righteous ends. (5.) I do observe out of Scripture that the Children of God, whenever they suffered most unjustly from wicked Men, yet they have not imputed it so much to the Instruments as to the Justice of God; as for example, I will give you here an Instance in *Joseph*, *It was not you that sent me hither, but God*, saith he. Thus in holy *Job* you shall see what a complication of Wickedness there was to bring about his afflictions, there was the Devil's Malice seeking to ruine and destroy him, there was also the Malice of wicked Men, the *Chaldeans* and *Sabeans*, and yet *Job 1. 21.* he ascribes all to the Providence of God, *The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* So David, when his Son *Absalom* rebelled against him, still he cries, *It is the Lord, &c.* Thus in the Book of the *Lamentations*, when *Israel* had been so barbarously destroyed by their Enemies, yet they referred all to the Providence of God: yea, (Beloved) in that act of the betraying and murdering of our Saviour, tho' there was so much Wickedness in Men, yet our blessed Saviour expressly saith, *it was the cup that his heavenly Father gave him to drink*; and therefore in all unjust oppressions it is our work and duty to look above Men to the Providence of God, therefore we must *hear the voice of the Rod, and him who hath appointed it*, and not dwell too much upon the Instruments or Second Causes, they are but as the *Axe* or the *Staff*, or the *Rod*, it is God's Hand that limits, orders, and appoints them for holy and gracious ends. And so much for the

the first part, how that all the Actions of wicked Men are ordered by the Will and Providence of God.

Secondly, I come now to enquire how far the holy and righteous God can or doth concur in the evil actions of Men; that He doth so, is most certain, but how far, is the Question, and most Interpreters have been puzl'd in this matter, but I shall endeavour to do it first negatively, for I will tell you, the truth lies between two Extreame; (1.) It is the highest Blasphemy for any, from these places of Scripture, to charge God with being the Author of Sin. (2.) There is another Extreame to be avoided, to think this Providence of God is only a bare permission of Sin; and then I shall shew you afterward more particularly of the influence and concurrence of the most holy, wise, and good God in the evil actions of wicked Men. First, Almighty God is not, neither can be, the Author or proper Cause of any Sin: that I shall lay down for a great truth, that He never works Sin it self, or moves us to sin inwardly; that He doth not necessitate Men to sin, because from these conclusions some Adversaries would charge Sin upon God. God can neither do Sin nor compel us to sin; to affirm this would be very Blasphemy; for, first, God is the Supream Good, he is all Goodness, Holiness, and Light, and there can be no Evil, no Darknes in him; for to ascribe Evil of Sin to the Supream Good, is to make light the cause of darknes: *Heb. 6. 18. It is impossible for God to lye.* Again, he that hates Sin, he that forbids it and severely punishes it, it is impossible he should be the Author of Sin. It would be the unjustest thing in the World for God to punish that which himself causes. Again I consider, if God should do so, Sin would be no Sin, for all Sin is that which is a contrariety to God's Will and Law; and therefore the Apostle St. James tells us, *Let no man say when he is tempted that he is tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, nether tempteth he any man.* It is inconsistent with the holiness and purity of God, to be in any wise the Author of Sin; therefore St Basil saith, It is as high a Blasphemy to make God the Author of Sin, as to deny him to be a God. No, beloved, all Sin comes from the Creature, *Thy destruction is of thy self*, tho' God makes use of it for gracious purposes; as for example, the Envy and Malice of Joseph's Brethren came from them-

themselves, but only God order'd it for the good of *his People*. We must distinguish between the cause of Sin and the use of Sin; Man is the cause of Sin and the Actor of Sin, but God can use Sin for purposes beyond what Man design'd by it. You know the Viper has Poyson in it, which is of a destructive nature, and yet a skilful Physician can make use of this Poyson as an Antidote against Poyson. I will draw this as a second Caution, That in God's ordering and making use of Sin there is more than his bare permission of Sin, that is, to let Men be wicked, and take no farther care in it. No, I say, in all those places I have quoted, as his sending *Joseph* into *Egypt*, &c. it implies an Efficiency. The most Sins that are done in the World are done by evil Men, and tho' God be not the Author, yet he is the Orderer, the Governor and Disposer of them. A wise King can make use of a Traytor to bring to pass his own ends, so God makes use of wicked mens Sins to work contrary to their ends. So *Joseph's* Brethren never thought of bringing about God's end in their malice against him. So a Physician applys Leaches to draw out corrupt Blood, but they only desire to satisfy their Lust. So God makes use of wicked mens Covetousness and Ambition to chastise his People, and do them good.

S E C T. II.

I Shall now enter upon this great Point, (but I must tell you with as much fear and trembling as ever I did upon any Subject) namely, How far the holy and wise God doth or may concur in the evil actions of sinful Men. I shall keep close to the Scripture, and shew you in nine particulars.

1. God doth concur by permitting of them, that is, by not hindring the committing those Sins as he might have done; and this is expressed *Acts* 14. 16. *He suffer'd them to walk in their own ways*, saith the Apostle. I confess, 'tis very clear so far, for no Sin in the World could be done if God did not permit them. And I will shew you several ways whereby God hinders the commission of Sin: thus he hinder'd *Abimelech* from committing folly with *Abraham's* Wife, *Gen.* 20. 6. so he hinder'd *Balaam*, when he came with a resolution to curse *Israel*, he hinder'd *Esau* from hurting his Brother *Jacob*. Nay, the Devils in Hell are under Chains, God can hinder them, and does hinder them, when he will. We read
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he could not touch *Job* nor his Cattel, till God had given him liberty. There are several ways and means whereby God does this, (1.) By taking away the power of wicked Men, as he did of *Jeroboam*, when he stretched forth his hand against the Prophet, sometime when he stirs up another power to deliver his People from Oppression, sometimes by secretly enclining the Hearts of Men to do good to such as they designed to hurt, as he did by *Laban*, when he went after *Jacob*: so God sent *Abigail* to divert *David* from exercising his intended Revenge against *Nabal*. Now when God removes these impediments, this is the first way of God's concurrence, when he does it by his permission; and for this we are much obliged to God, for keeping wicked Men and Devils in Bonds, and for limiting their Malice and Enmity, for if God should give leave to them to execute their Power and Malice, all the World would quickly be in flames.

2. God concurs in the evil actions of Men by a general concurrence and co-operation in the action it self, for you must know God Almighty has an immediate influence and concurrence in all the actions of his Creatures, both good and bad, *Acts* 17. 28. *In him we live and move and have our being*. It is that which all *Christians* and most *Philosophers* do agree in, That all actions of the Creature do depend upon the motion and influence of the first Cause. I will instance in those that curse and swear and blaspheme the Name of God, they could not move their Tongues, if God did not give them leave, and co-operate in the action: so the power whereby a Thief steals is from God. But here they do not make God the cause of their Sin in a moral but in a physical sense: they say well, That God doth concur as to the natural action it self, but not to the sinfulness in that action: God concurs to the natural action, but the obliquity of it proceeds from the wickedness of the Sinner's Will.

3. God doth concur by his Providence, in administering occasions and opportunities which wicked Men do abuse to Sinfulness. So *Jer.* 5. 22. God tells us of *laying a stumbling-block in the way of Sinners*; He gives or lays before them things that perhaps are not sinful in themselves, as when he gives to wicked men *Health, Strength, Wealth, Prosperity, Beauty, &c.* these have no harm in them.

themselves, but when they take occasion to abuse them to their Lusts, and there are some that *make their Table a Snare to them* : Nay, those things that in their own nature would tend to make them better, yet they take occasion to make themselves worse by them : as for instance, How often does good Admonition make some Men the worse? nay, I tell you, the very Divinity and Miracles of Christ did harden the *Pharisees* Hearts ; nay, sometimes when God by his Providence does suffer Men to fall into wicked Company, as he did *Joseph*, when his Brethren design'd to murder him, God did at the same time order some *Midianites* to go by, that they might sell him to them.

The fourth way of God's concurrence is, by withdrawing his Grace, and leaving Men to the power of their Lusts. Wicked men have a violent inclination to many Sins, which God in his Providence many times restrains, but when he leaves them up to themselves, they quickly run into the commission of them, they are oftentimes as a Dog chained up, that cannot do the Mischief he has a mind to. When God saith of wicked Men as he did to *Ephraim*, when he was joyned to Idols, *Let him alone* ; when God leaves them so to their Sin, as to be without any Afflictions or Terrors of Conscience, it is the most dreadful Judgment in the World. And by this you may understand those Scriptures where God is said to blind and harden Sinners Hearts : This is most righteous and just, that they who despise God's Grace, and wilfully run into Sin, that God should punish them with their own Sins, and say, *He that is filthy let him be filthy still* ; O, this is the most dreadful Judgment in the World, when Men are given up by God to their own Lusts.

The fifth way is, when God leaves Sinners to the temptations of the Devil, or of wicked Men, as, when he leaves them up to wicked Acquaintance, to tempt them and flatter them in their sins. I will give you 2 or 3 Instances in Scripture: thus God permitted a lying Spirit to go forth in the Nation of the *Israelites*, God saith *Go, and thou shalt prevail* ; so *Ezek. 14*. God tells them, that for the Sins of the People he would leave them up to wicked and false Prophets, and when they come to enquire of them they shall deceive them, and this as a Punishment of their former Sins. So *2 Thes. 2*. the coming and prevailing of Antichrist is there said to be *with all*

deceivableness of unrighteousness, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. God may suffer false Prophets to work signs and wonders, and to come with all *deceivableness of unrighteousness*, but what was the reason? *because they did not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved; and therefore God gave them over to strong Delusions, to believe Lyes, that they may be damned.* I pray God we are not in a great measure concerned in this point; you see God hath sent forth a lying Spirit, whereby our Adversaries have drawn away thousands, what is the reason? because they have not lived up to the Light of the Gospel. When Popery comes, it makes People unnatural to Parents, to destroy Cities and Kingdoms; why certainly Beloved, as the Apostle saith, *2 Tim. 2. 16. such are taken captive of the Devil at his will*, that is, whatever Sin the Devil gives them opportunity to commit, when he tempts them to Uncleaness or Drunkenness, they are ready to act it: such, like *Judas*, are given into the full possession of Satan.

A sixth way of God's Providence in sinful actions (and I desire you to take notice of it) is a directing by his secret Providence the Sinner to such or such a particular Object, which perhaps he was indifferent to before: as for example sake, a wicked Man may be covetous, or angry, or cruel, now it may be indifferent to him which of these Sins he commits, but God in his secret Providence lets him go out upon one and not upon another, like a great Mastiff in chains, it is indifferent to him who he bites and hurts if he be loosed, but the Owner lets him loose upon one that he would have him hurt, and he accordingly falls upon him. And therefore *Solomon* tells us, *A man deviseth his own way, but the Lord directs his steps.* *Nebuchadnezzar* the great King of *Babylon* was resolved to fall upon some of his Neighbours, he could not tell whether he should fall upon *Amon* or *Judea*, now God in his Providence directed him to fall upon *Judea*; so *1 Chron. 5. 26.* it is said, *God stirred up the spirit of Pul to go against Israel*; and this is done without any Sin to be therefore imputed to God. It is said, *the hearts of Kings are in the hand of the Lord, and he turns them as the rivers of water.* It is an allusion to those Countries where there was little Rain from Heaven, all their Gardens and Meadows were water'd by standing Waters or Pools, where they had
Sluces

Sluces and Gutters, which they could pull up, and so let the Water run which way they pleased. So God can order the Hearts of Kings as shall best please him.

A seventh way is, when God gives wicked Men power and success, and to prosper in unjust actions: this is constantly verified in Scripture, and by Experience in the World, that God may suffer good People to be afflicted and injuriously dealt with in just causes, and wicked Men to prosper, and bring wicked and unjust actions to pass: so when God raises up a great King to be a Scourge to his Neighbors, he will give him Wisdom, Policy, and Success; and also when the Lord is resolved to punish a Nation, he can take away their Wisdom and Success. Thus God many times *suffers the Tabernacles of Robbers to prosper*, and suffers good men for good causes to fall into the hands of wicked and unreasonable men. *Christ* himself saith, that *the Power* Pilate had to crucify him, *he had it from God*; but you will say, Is this no prejudice to his Holiness? I answer no, for God doth not give wicked men Success as a reward of their actions, but to make use of them as the Instruments of his Providence: as, suppose a King should make use of a very wicked man to be his Hangman, this doth not reflect upon the Goodness of the Prince.

The eighth way of God's Providence in governing wicked men and their actions (and I desire you to take notice of it) is, by limiting, governing, and disposing wicked men and their actions, that they shall not be able to hurt whom they will, nor when they will, but just so far as God would have it: as we find in *Joseph's Brethren*, their design was to murder him, but (1.) God stirs up *Reuben* to divert that purpose: well, afterwards God, to bring his Ends to pass, lets them sell him, and at that very moment orders the *Midianites* to come by. How admirably was this matter ordered and limited by God? So, for the time, God will not suffer wicked men to act at one time, and yet will suffer the same to bring about their purposes at another time. So it was with the *Jews*, they would oftentimes have taken *Christ*, but could not, because *the hour was not yet come*; but afterwards he tells them, *I taught daily in the temple, and you laid no hands on me, but now is your hour*. So we may observe how God doth sometimes stop Fire from doing

Mischief, and at another time suffers it to break out with irresistible violence : so also, for the continuance of wicked men in their actions, it is said, *The Rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the Lot of the righteous*. It may come upon them, but it shall not rest upon them : so God will not suffer *good men* to be tempted above what they are able ; *wicked men* shall not be able to put one dram into the *Cup of bitterness*, more than what God has appointed. Indeed, this is the foundation of all our Comfort, to remember, that whatever we may suffer, wicked men are but as an Ax in *God's Hand*, they cannot, as to time, or continuance, or degrees, go beyond what God has purposed.

The last way is, by God's over-ruling and ordering the Effects of Sin beyond, and many times contrary to the purpose and design of Sinners, and this makes up the compleat government of Sin. So it was in *Joseph's* case, *As for you, you thought evil, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass as it is at this day, to save much people alive*. You meant it for evil, and indeed, beloved, in one and the same action there are different ends proposed. Many times wicked men design nothing, but to bring about their own Malice, Covetousness, and Envy, but God turns it to many wise and holy ends. So in *Job's* case, the Devil's design was to make him curse and blaspheme God, but God's design was to make *Job* bless him. So God is said to send *Assyria* against *Israel*, *to punish a hypocritical Nation, but he thinks not so*, his design is *to root up and destroy much People* ; his design was to plunder and destroy, but God's design was to correct Sin. So it was in the Sufferings of our Blessed Saviour, the *Pharisees* out of envy sought to murder him, *Pilate* only for fear condemned him ; the Soldiers, all that they meant was their Profit ; but now the Envy and Malice of the one, and the Covetousness of the other God over-ruled, to bring to pass the greatest Blessing that ever befel Mankind, the Death and Resurrection of Christ ; so that God can make wicked men work his ends when they seem most to cross them. Thus Physicians can make an Antidote to expel Poison out of Poison it self. And I conclude this point in telling you, that the most excellent Works of God's Providence that were ever brought to pass in the World are, when He makes use of the sinful actions of Men to effect matters

ters quite contrary to what they intended. Thus I have endeavoured to clear the Providence of God from any mistake of Injustice or Unholiness, and have shewn how the holy and wise God overrules and governs the evil actions of wicked Men and Devils.

S E C T. III.

I Come now to the third Point, and that is, That God Almighty can make good use of the sinful actions of wicked Men, that what they intend for Evil, that he can and often does turn to Good. This is here expressed in the Text, *God sent me before you to preserve life*; and I will ground this upon another expression of *Joseph, Gen. 50. 20. As for you, you thought evil against me, but God meant it for good.* You shall observe in this Story, that the design of his Brethren was nothing but the gratifying their own Envy and Malice, in sending him away; the *Ishmaelites* in buying him meant nothing but their own profit; *Potifer's* Wife, we read, minded nothing but her own Lust, and yet all these things were over-ruled by God Almighty for the good of his Church. I shall here handle, that God Almighty doth turn the Sins of wicked men to good, he makes them serve his designs for good. I shall here vindicate the Providence of God from the great Quarrel that has been against it in all Ages, by reason of the actions of wicked men, and the great wickedness that is in the World; for, it is a Saying of the Atheists, *That if the World be governed by a God so just, holy, and wise, why is there so much wickedness in the World? Can he not hinder it?* I shall therefore shew you, that God's permitting so much Sin in the World is a fruit of his infinite Goodness, because he can bring so much good out of it. *St. Austin* saith, 'God, that is infinitely good and powerful, would not permit Sin in the World if he were not able to make that Sin turn to some great Good. All wicked Men and Devils are under God's Dominion, he overrules all their actions, and there is no Evil in second causes, but he makes it serve his own holy and wise ends. It is true, Sin, as it is in the Creature, is the greatest deformity, darkness, and disorder in the World, but God Almighty is able to order it as a wise Physician can make use of Poison to expel Poison, so, tho' Sin in it self be so evil, wholly evil, yet God Almighty can make it serve his best and wisest ends. For the truth of this proposition, I may observe to you, that

that the greatest actions that ever God brought to pass in the World have been occasion'd by the Sins of wicked men, as the occasion of sending Christ was the Sin of *Adam*, and the bringing to pass our Redemption could not be done without the concurrence of wicked actions ; as, *Acts 2. 22. By wicked hands you have crucified and slain him*, saith the Apostle ; and *Acts 4. 27. For of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the People of Israel are gathered together.* Consider how much wickedness there was in that act ; the Treachery of *Judas*, the Envy of the *Pharisees*, the Covetousness of the Soldiers, the Cruelty of the rest, and yet all this God made use of to bring to pass the most glorious action that ever was in the World. I will give you some more Instances of this, and mention two things, whereby I shall more evidently demonstrate, That God does make use of the Sins of wicked men for good purposes, (1.) for the manifestation of his own Glory. (2.) For the great good he doth thereby in the World. *Rom. 3. 7. The truth of God aboundeth by my lye unto his glory, and he maketh the wrath of man to praise him.* I shall mention Five Attributes of God, that are more especially illustrated by God's permitting and ordering the Sins of wicked men : (1.) The Attribute of God's Patience and Long-suffering, he proclaims himself, *The Lord God, merciful and long-suffering* : Where could there have been room for the exercise of his Patience and Long-suffering, if there be no Sin ? So *Rom. 9. 22.* How should we know God's Patience, if *with much long-suffering he did not endure the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.* (2.) The glory of his Justice : God's punishing of Sinners could not have been known without the permission of Sin : *I will get my self glory over Pharoah* ; how so ? by executing my Judgments upon him for Sin ; *For this cause have I raised thee up, that I may shew forth my power in thee, and make known my glory in all the earth.* And there is no question but the Glory of God is shewn forth in the manifestation of his Wrath, both here and hereafter. (3.) The Glory of his Mercy and Free Grace appears in pardoning Sin ; how could that have been done if there had been no Sin ? *Rom. 5. 20. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.* In a word, all the Riches of God's Mercy and Goodness and Free Grace to the Creature supposes Sin, it could not be without Sin ; had Man remained without Sin, Christ had

never died; there had been no Covenant of Grace. (4.) The Glory of God's admirable Wisdom appears in ordering and governing the Sins of the World; the chief part of his Wisdom consists in bringing to pass those ends by means that seem most improbable and unlikely. Thus 'tis in matters of State-policy; it is the greatest part of Wisdom to know how to govern evil and discontented Subjects. There is nothing in the World so contrary in it self to the Glory of God as Sin is, nothing that God more hates. Now, is not this the glory of his Wisdom, to make wicked Men and Devils themselves, when they strive most to oppose his glory than to do him most honour. I will give you several Instances; sometimes in opposing the Counsels of wicked men, and taking them in their own craft; and so He did *Pharoah*, that what wicked men design for the ruine of his People, he can turn it to their advantage. *Nazianzen* saith, That *the Masterpiece of God's wisdom is, to make Enemies do his own work*. Lastly, It makes appear the greatness of his Power; the greatness of his power appears in working without means, or contrary to means; it was to make a thing of nothing when God created the World: yet there seems to be greater power in turning Evil to Good than in making the World, because here is nothing to contribute, but all as may be to oppose it: It is the Almighty Power of God that brings light out of darkness, and evil out of good, and the greatest good out of the greatest evil.

The second general Head is, to shew the good that God works in the World by wicked Men. I beseech you to mind these things. (1.) God makes use of wicked men sometimes as the Instruments of his Vengeance to punish other wicked men; thus many times he uses evil Angels, but especially evil men, to destroy his Enemies, one wicked man to execute his Justice upon another: so he doth when he raiseth up great Princes to be Instruments of his Vengeance and Plagues upon a wicked Nation. Thus God raised up *Nebuchadnezzar* to punish *Israel* when they had sinned, but he dreamed nothing at all of serving God's Ends, but only his own Ambition, but yet he was God's Instrument. Many times we are ready to quarrel at God's Providence, when we see wicked Princes conquer, and destroy, and invade when they have no just Right, but we consider not they are acted by a higher Hand: sometimes God doth it by private men, sometimes he raiseth up one Oppressor to punish

punish another Oppressor, sometimes he raises up rebellious Children to punish Parents who had been disobedient when they were Children, sometimes he punishes some persons with Treachery and Unfaithfulness, which had been formerly treacherous and unfaithful themselves. (2.) God makes use of the Sins of wicked men to chastise and punish his own People when they have offended and sinned against him ; God makes the Sins of wicked men as Rods to chastise them, and bring them back from their wanderings. I will give you one or two famous Instances of this, *Isa. 10. 5. O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in their hand is my indignation*: see the 6, & 7, to the 12. ver. God tells us he had a work to do by the King of *Assyria*, namely, *to punish a hypocritical Nation*, but his design was only to kill and destroy. Another Instance you have *2 Sam. 12. 11.* and so on. You know *David* had sinned a great Sin, an indelible Sin, that God always remembred, tho' upon *David's* Repentance God pardon'd him, yet he told him, he would raise up a Sword out of his own Bowels to correct him : first, one of his own Sons incestuously ravishes his own Sister, then *Abalom* murders his Brother, then God raises up this Son to be a scourge to him by lying with his Wives and Concubines, and after by raising up a long Rebellion against him : And, how many Sins were committed in these matters, and yet all this God made use of for chastising of *David*, and bringing him to Repentance ? I will give you a familiar Instance to illustrate this to you, from a Leach's drawing of Blood ; the Physician applies them, they draw Blood to satisfy their natural inclination, but the Physician uses them to draw away ill humors : so wicked men afflict God's people from the hatred they bear them, but God designs it to correct and humble them for Sin, and so to bring them to Repentance. (3.) God makes use of the Sins of wicked men for the tryal of the Graces of his own Children ; and this is another admirable End, to use the Sins of wicked men to make good men so much the better : This evidently appears in the famous story of *Job*, the Devil meerly out of malice tempts him to curse God, but God makes use of it to encrease *Job's* Graces. I will instance in two points more ; (1.) When God suffers False Prophets, Seducers, and Hereticks to go about to *undermine* the *True Religion* in a Nation, this is a very sad Providence, yet God has his ends in it, to try

try his own Children, and make them more stedfast in the Truth. So *Deut. 13.* the Lord tells them, He permits false Prophets to come among them, such as may give Signs and Wonders, which may come to pass: and see what is the reason of all this; *The Lord thy God doth it to prove thee, and to know whether thou wilt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.* And this something is more express in *1 Cor. 11. 19.* where the Apostle tells them, *There must be heresies, that they which are approved may be made manifest.* God suffers Seducers to come into a Church, the better to establish good men in the Truths they have received. It is true, ignorant and unstable men are quickly drawn aside to Errors, but when the true Religion is shaken by Errors and Heresies, there is nothing makes good men more to look about them, to examine diligently the Truths of Religion, and to conform themselves more carefully to them: so the wicked Practices and Lives of some makes those that are good men more diligent, more watchful, and more exact in their Conversations, and it is but Reason, for good men ought to live so, as to be God's Witnesses against a wicked World. Good men are the best in wicked times and places; the best Protestants are those that live in Popish Countries. *Jer. 24.* the Prophet makes mention of two Baskets of Figs, the one exceeding good, and the other exceeding bad, which were to set forth the state of the Church in that day, when there were great Corruptions among them, the good are ordinarily very good, and the bad are very bad. Now it is our Duty *to be burning and shining Lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*; when we see Intemperance abound, to be so much the more strict; when we see Uncleanliness not only to over-run the Land, but to grow bold and impudent; now to be more severe and chaste, when you see People begin to be atheistical, neglect the Service of God, then more firmly to resolve, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* Evil times lay Obligations upon good Christians to be so much the better. (4.) God makes use of the Sins of wicked men to exercise the Patience, and thereby to encrease the Reward of good men, who had heard of *Joseph's* Chastity, if it had not been for the Lust of his Mistress, for without wicked men there could be no Persecution, and if there be no Persecution, where can there be any Rewards for Patience? In a word, had there not been Per-

secution, where had been the Glory of Martyrdom? Thus God so orders it, that when wicked men seek most to destroy the Church, then he makes it so much the more glorious. It was a great Saying of a Martyr, *Come ye wicked Heathens, bring more Wracks, more Fire, more Torments, for hereby you add to my glory.* Lastly, the over-ruling Providence of God appears in making the Sins of wicked men, which were acted on purpose to frustrate his Purposes, the very proper means to bring them to pass. What was more contrary to God's Purpose of advancing *Joseph*, than to let him be sold for a Slave, and thrust into Prison. So in the Story of *Haman* and *Mordecai* in the Book of *Esther*, there was *Haman's* Envy, and Pride, and Malice, and barbarous Design of destroying all the *Jews*, yet God made all these cross Providences to be a means for the preservation and advancement of his Church. Thus, beloved, God can do good to his Church and Children by them that intended no such matter, as you may be sure. So *Jehu* was a means to make a great Reformation in *Israel*, to purge them from Idolatry; but, had *Jehu* any such intent? No, all his intent was to set up his own House by it. Another Instance we have in *Cyrus*, who, like other Heathen Princes, sought his own Wealth and Glory, yet he is said to be the Lord's Anointed, and to be raised up for the sake of *Jacob* his Servant. Nay, how many times has God made the Lusts of Men, the Ambition of Men, to serve those Ends of his, which they never dreamed of. The *Papists* tell us, it was the Lust and Ambition of *Hen. 8.* that was the occasion of our Reformation in Religion; why, beloved, we deny it not but God can make use of these to bring about good ends. We read in *Acts 8.* there was a great Persecution against the Church, and, what was the end God had in it? It was to scatter the Disciples in all parts of *Judea* and *Samarina*, where they preached the Word: why, if it had not been for this Persecution, it is probable they might have continued too long in *Jerusalem*. So *1 Phil. 12.* the Devil seeing *St. Paul* so useful a Minister of Christ, causes him to be put in Prison, but what was the end of it? *Those things which hapned to me are fallen out to the greater advancement of the Gospel, so that many of the Brethren being confirmed by my bonds, have been so much the more bold to preach the Gospel without fear.* The Church of God, like the Vine, flourishes the better for being cut and pruned, and

and it was grown a Proverb in the Primitive Church, *The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church*. I could give you Instances of this Providence of God in many private persons, where the malice of their Enemies has been a means to bring them to the highest advancements. I could tell you of a person that was falsely accused of a Murder, and having clear'd himself, the then Emperor took great notice of it, and advanced him to be a Captain, and afterwards he came to be Emperor himself. How many may say they had been undone if they had not been undone? And thus I have clear'd up this most excellent point, and there is not a point of greater use for vindicating the Honour of God's Providence.

S E C T. IV. *Application.*

I Shall now draw some Inferences from this Text thus opened, that may have an Influence either for our Instruction, or for the Government of our Lives, when we suffer by the Sins of wicked Men. I shall handle them by way of observation.

The first is, That God Almighty is just, and holy, and good, even in his governing the Sins of wicked men: This shall be to vindicate the Holiness, and Justice, and Purity of Almighty God, in his concurrence with the sinful Actions of Men; it is one of the most difficult points in Religion, and one of the greatest depths of the Providence of God; to clear it up, I shall begin with this Story: that is, *Joseph's being sold into Egypt*: Here are two concurring causes, his Brethren sold him, and yet God sent him. So it is said in the *Acts*, *The Patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt*. I shall here clear up God's Justice in this matter. We read, there was first a Determination and Decree of God to advance *Joseph*, for the preservation of *Jacob* and his Family; well, to bring this to pass, God intends to make use of his Brethren and their Envy and Malice to sell him into *Egypt*; God does not infuse Malice into them, nor stir them up to Sin, for that was in their Hearts before. But first, God does not hinder them. You heard before, how, when they first determin'd to murder *Joseph*, God would not let it go that way, but when they had a mind to sell him, he did suffer them, because it was for his Ends: and observe how God order'd it, that the Merchants should happen to come by that very day to whom his Brethren sold him. It is a

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hard Question, Why this Affliction is rather attributed to God than to them, *It was not you that sent me hither, but God*; but the reason is God's permission and offering them an occasion in his Providence, which he knew would take effect; and therefore it was said, *God did it*. I shall, as briefly as I can, open and answer this Question: In all the Sins of the World, *Let God be true, and every man a Liar*, we must abhor and detest all that does in the least attribute any Sin to be God's; God neither infuses Wickedness, nor tempts or stirs up People to sin, but only by his Providence permits, orders, and governs it for his own wise and holy Ends. I will here answer some Objections briefly; (1) You will say, how can it stand with the Holiness of God to permit Sin when he can hinder it? I answer, It can be no stain to God's Holiness, for God doth but leave the Creature to the liberty of his own Will; and it was most agreeable, that those whom God has made free and reasonable Creatures should not be constrained, but to leave wicked Men and Devils to their own Wills, especially since God can bring so much Good out of Evil. But secondly, you will say, Why doth God minister occasion in his Providence? I answer, That doth not reflect upon God neither, for it is reasonable God should make a tryal of the Obedience of his Creature to him, but he could not know that, or that could not be known, if he did not leave them to their own Wills. (2.) I do consider, that most of the occasions that Men abuse to Sin, are such as in their own nature are good and naturally would drive them to Goodness; for, what is it that they use to harden themselves with, and abuse to Sin, but the very Blessings and Mercies of God.

Again, As to the other thing, God's ordering Sin to his own Glory, and the Good of his People, that cannot be any Objection against God's Holiness or Justice: What is more reasonable, than that God should bring Glory to himself from wicked Men and Devils, force Glory out of them, above and contrary to their Intent. It is an Instance of the great Wisdom, Power, and Goodness of God, that there can be no Evil, but he can regulate and order for good ends. But then you may object, Doth not the Scripture say, *God stirs up wicked men, and blinds them, and hardens them, and sends them strong delusions, that they may believe a lye, and be damn'd*? How can you in this vindicate the Purity and Holiness

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of God? I answer, in all those places where God is said to harden the Heart, &c. We must understand, in some places it imports but a meer permission of God, or, at most, but withdrawing his Grace, and leaving Men up to the Temptations of wicked Men and Devils. Secondly, God never withdraws his Grace from wicked men till they, by their former Sins, have deserved it. So *Pharoah* first hardned his own Heart, and then God in a judicial way hardned his Heart also: And, beloved, what is more reasonable, than that they that resist God's motions, and give up themselves wilfully to be seduced, that God should leave them up to the seduction of the Devil and wicked Men, he doth but punish them with their own Sin.

The next and greatest Objection, and most popular in all Ages of the World, is, God's prospering wicked men in evil ways, and afflicting good men in good ways. This was the great Objection of the Heathens, especially the *Epicureans*, and it has been a great stumbling to godly men; I remember four holy men in Scripture were shaken, and almost overthrown at the thoughts of it, as *Job*, *Job* 21. 6. *David*, *Psal.* 73. *Jeremiah*, *Jer.* 12. 1. and *Habakkuk*, *Hab.* 1. 13. Certainly, to Heathens, and such as deny future Rewards and Punishments, I do not know a greater Objection: But to this I answer, (1.) It is certain, that this Life is not intended by God to be the place of Punishments and Rewards, but only as a Preparation for another Life. (2.) No Man or People were ever so righteous, but they had Sin enough in them, which their own Conscience tells them deserves the greatest Punishment. (3.) I do consider, that wicked men, when God advances them, and gives them Success, it is not for their sake, or out of love to them, but because he raiseth them up in his Providence to be his Instruments to punish other wicked men; He does not give them any Success for their own desert. Now, beloved, this is the most reasonable thing in the World, in all Kingdoms the vilest of men are made use of for Executioners, and indeed there is none fit for this work but the wicked: Doth a Shepherd set his Sheep to worry one-another? Godly men are not fit or qualified to kill or plunder other men unjustly; therefore, I say, God doth not make Instruments of wicked men for their goodness, but because they only are fit for such Work as this is, to be God's Executioners. I re-
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member a Story, when *Phosai* had murder'd the Emperor his Master, and made himself Emperor, and a holy man complaining why God should set so wicked a man over the Nation, the Answer was, *They did not deserve a better.* It is for the same Reason that God sends *Turks* to oppress *Christians*. Again consider, that wicked men, even in their wicked actions, have secret Lashes of Conscience; or if they are advanced a little while, yet, as the *Psalmist* saith, *God sets them in slippery places.* That man that shall now see *Pharoah* so stout, and *Herod* so proud, stay but a while and you shall see one drowned in the Sea, and the other eaten up of Lice. Again, tho' God suffer good men to be afflicted of the wicked, it is for their good, it is to fit them for God and Glory, it is to rub off their Rust and Rubbish, and fit them for God. And lastly, I say as St. *Austin* doth, *Stay but till the Day of Recompence, and there will appear no proportion between the Wicked's Prosperity here and their Sufferings hereafter.* So also between the Sufferings of Good Men here, and their Eternal Happiness. Geographers tell us the World is round, notwithstanding all the Hills and Mountains in it; but, how can that be? why, they say, all these Hills and Mountains, in comparison of the circumference of the Earth, are nothing. So the Sufferings of the good, and the Prosperity of the wicked, may seem great to us here, yet compare them to Eternity, and they are nothing. Suppose a Person is condemn'd to death for High-Treason, and his uncharitable Friend shall come and make him merry and drunk, whereby he forgets his Condition, do you envy this poor man this Happiness, when perhaps in two or three hours he must be hanged? So, if you could see a Wretch in Hell, after 40 years of Prosperity on Earth, he would tell you he had paid dear for his Happiness: therefore the Prosperity of the wicked upon Earth is no more a stain to the Holiness of God, than the Beams of the Sun upon a stinking Dunghill do reflect on the Sun. It was an excellent Saying of *Dionysius*, *All things that are seen in the hands of second causes, when they once come to God's hand, he turns and orders them to excellent purposes.* Those things that are unjust in respect of Men, yet are righteous as they are Instruments in the hand of God's Providence: as, suppose thy Child or thy Servant shall prove wicked and undutiful to thee, this is unjust in respect of them, but as they are Instruments to punish thy Sins,

Sins, they are just upon that account. I shall conclude this first Inference by stirring you and my self up to the contemplating and admiring the Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice of God's Providence, in governing the actions of wicked men ; this is the Masterpiece of God's Providence, as *Isa. 27. 29. This also cometh from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel.* Here we see in the highest sense Sampson's Riddle verified, That *God can bring Meat out of the Eater, and Honey out of the Carcass*; and I tell you, tho' we now quarrel at Atheism, Debauchery, and Wickedness, God shall make manifest, at the last day, that all these things have worked together for the Glory of God, and the Good of them that serve him, and that we could not well have been without the malice and spight of wicked men. So much for the first Inference.

The second Inference is this, That the concurrence of God in the Sins of wicked men doth not excuse nor extenuate their Sin, nor diminish their Punishment. I am here, beloved, upon another deep point of the Providence of God, That the Providence of God, his Decrees, and his ordering and governing of sinful men, do not in the least excuse them from Guilt or Punishment, tho' God brings Good out of their Evil. *St. Paul* proposes and answers the Question, *Rom. 3. 7. If the Truth of God hath more abounded thro' my Lye unto his glory, why then am I reckoned a sinner, and not rather as we be slanderously reported? and some affirm, that we say, Let us do evil, that good may come, whose damnation is just.* That is, why should God count them Sinners, or punish them as Sinners, that have been Instruments to serve his Providence? This Objection some People make use of, not only among *Heathens*, but *Christians*, you shall have them say, *I could not help it, if God had not put me upon it I should never have done it.* I remember a Story of a Woman, a Harlot, that had three Bastard Sons, which afterwards came to be very great and eminent Persons, as *Peter Lombard, Gracian, and Comestor*, and when afterwards she was come to Confession, she said, she could not confess her self sinful in this matter, because her Sons proved all such brave Men. But I shall refute this Opinion by these Five Considerations.

First, The Providence of God is not given to be the Rule of our Actions, but his Commands ; the Rule of our Actions is his Command, and not what he doth in his Providence: as *St. Austin* saith,

saith, *We may will what God wills in his Providence, and yet sin.* A Parent lies sick, his good Son is troubled, uses all means for his recovery, God has decreed his Death, he dyes, the Son is troubled, why the Son in all this does the Will of God, tho' it do not agree with his Decrees : so a wicked Son may wish his Father's death, and God decrees it also, he dyes, yet tho' this Will in the Son was agreeable to God's secret and providential Will, it is sinful. The Rule of our Actions is not what God wills, but what God has commanded us to do in his Word. If God's providence would excuse Sin, no wicked Men or Devils could have been guilty of Sin.

Secondly, I answer, Wicked men do not aim at the Glory of God in their Sins, nor at the good God intends to bring about by them, their aims are different from God's aim, as herein *Joseph* saith to his Brethren, *You thought evil against me, but God meant it for good.* *Isa. 10.* the Prophet saith, God would send a *Heathen Prince* against the hypocritical Nation of the *Jews*, to punish them, but 'tis said, *He meant not so* ; he doth not intend to do God's Work, but all his End was, to enlarge his Dominions.

Thirdly, The Good that follows from wicked Actions is not a natural Effect of Sin, but comes only from the over ruling power of God, and so is meerly accidental to the Sin: as for example ; Sin is directly naught, no Creature can bring Good out of it : when a man sins, he is said to break God's Laws, and so to reproach and dishonour God himself ; now if God, contrary to the nature of Sin, shall occasion Good by it, Sin is ne'r the less Sin : as for example ; Poison is ne'er the less Poison because a wise Physician knows how to make an Antidote out of it to expel Poison.

Fourthly, It follows also, that it is righteous with God to punish wicked men, tho' they are Instruments to serve his Providence by their Sins ; God may use them, and yet they deserve punishment, because God punishes them for their evil Intentions, and not according to the effect of their Sins. *Herod*, and *Pilate*, and *Judas* all went to Hell when God had done with them ; so *Absalom*, when God had by him punish'd *David*, then he takes him away.

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Lastly, Doth not the Intention of God's Glory excuse the Sin ? I answer, No ; the Sin is not the less sinful upon that account, as *Rom. 3. 8.* for God needs not our Sins to bring to pass his Glory, God will not have us break his Commands out of a pretence to bring to pass his Glory : it is not lawful, for the greatest Glory to God or Good of Mankind, to commit the least Sin ; to break God's Laws for God's Glory, is not lawful upon any pretence. And therefore they that can deceive and do Injuries to others, and perhaps their whole Lives have been a course of Injustice, and this under the thoughts and pretence of doing good with what they get, and bringing Glory to God, it is nothing else but a Delusion and Deceit : But thou Hypocrite, what need has God of thy Robberies to do him service ? So the Jesuites have determin'd, that in defence of the Catholick Cause a man may tell a Lye, because it is to a good end, to carry on their Cause. I shall shew you something of their Doctrine about Equivocation, from their own allowed Writers. (1.) It is determin'd, that officious Lyes, when they injure none, and do good to others, they are at most but venial Sins : So the consequence is, if they tell an officious Lye for the preservation of themselves, but especially for the honour of God, and the good of their Society, it is but a venial, a pardonable Sin : this most of the *Papists* hold. (2.) They tell us of the Doctrine of Equivocation, that some things, as they are spoken, are directly Sins ; but if we keep any other true sense in our Minds, it is reconcilable to Truth. Again they tell us, Some things a man is bound to deny, and that upon Oath, That if a Priest, from Confession, knows any thing of Adultery or Murder in another, and he be examin'd in the matter, he may lawfully forbear to tell the truth, or deny it ; and the reason is, because he knows it under the Seal of Confession. And they made great use of this Doctrine in the *Powder Treason*. Again, they hold, When they are called before an unlawful Judge, (as they hold us to be Hereticks) they may lye and forswear ; but especially they hold, That no Civil Judge can judge a Priest. Again, they hold, If they are accused before a Judge, and the Crime is not clearly proved, and if they have any way to evade the Witnesses, they may lye and forswear themselves with a mental reservation, till the case be made out as clear

as the Sun. Again, they averr, That at their Executions they may deny their Crimes too, because when they have confessed to a Priest, and received Absolution, they are in a state of Salvation, and absolved from their Sins. Therefore fix this in your Hearts, That for the greatest Good in the World it is not lawful to commit the least Sin.

S E C T. V.

MY third Inference is this, If all the Sins of Men be order'd and govern'd by God, the only true way to secure our selves from hurt by wicked men, is, to make our Peace with God. It follows most directly true; for, if all the Sins of wicked men be order'd, limited, and over-ruled by God, the most secure method in all Troubles, is, to make our Peace with God, for if God be ours, all the Malice of the Devils in Hell, and wicked Men on Earth, shall do us no harm.

The first Lesson we are to learn under every Rod, is, to believe God's Hand in it. It is a thing, beloved, that we all acknowledge in the notion, yet certainly one of the hardest things in practise: *Micah 6.* the Prophet tells us, *It is the greatest part of wisdom to bear the rod, and him who has appointed it*; for the greatest cause of our impenitency under God's heavy Judgments, is, because Men generally look no higher than the Second Causes; we impute our Troubles to our own Negligence, and the Malice of Men, but look not up to God: *Isa. 36. 11.* *When thou liftest up thy hand they will not see it.* So *Jer. 5. 12.* when the Prophet told them God had sent the *Assyrian* to punish them, they denied it, and said, *It is not the Lord.* Beloved, we are loth, in any Affliction we suffer, to acknowledge God's Hand in it; and the reason is, because it would be a secret acknowledgment of our own Guilt. Thus, if there happen to be a Defeat in War, we reckon it comes only by Negligence or Cowardise; or if a Fire happens, we say, this is the Malice of Men, but we never look up to God in all this. This is the great cause of Impenitence, for how can we repent of our Sins, if we believe we are only injured by Men, and not punished by GOD? We ought to believe *there is no evil in a City but what the Lord has done*: all Evils that come either immediately

diately from God's Hand, or from the Malice, Wickedness, and Injustice of Men, GOD has a hand in all. Thus *Job*, when the *Chaldeans* and *Sabeans* had robbed him, he ascribes it to the Lord, and not to their Injustice, *Iſa.* 10. 5. When a plundering Army was to be sent, 'tis said God sent them; so when *Absalom* rebelled and sought the ruine of his Father, it is said, *God would stir up evil to him out of his own house.* So, *1 Kin.* 11. when *Solomon* follow'd strange Women, then God stirred up Enemies against him. God sometimes raises up base and fordid men to be Plagues and Scourges to the most powerful People, for the Sins of such a People. So Beloved, if we are proud and confident in our own Strength, our Sins may expose us to be a Prey to the basest Nation in the World. Again, sometimes God limits the Career of wicked men, as he does the proud Waves of the Sea, saying, *Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further.* When God has done with his Instruments, he will destroy them: It follows then, that it is the greatest Folly for men to seek to remove their Afflictions so long as they continue in their Sins against God, for what Folly is it to look to the Instrument, and not to the Hand that moves it? it is as if a poor Prisoner should court the Executioner, and not seek to the Judge. All these are our Follies: For first, we can with no reason expect God should remove his Judgments while we continue in our Sins; if God does for a time cease Judgments, we must not take it as a Pardon of our Sins, or a Removal of our Judgment, but only a Reprieve for a time: If God does withdraw one Rod or Judgment that we may fear, he will find new ones to chastise a wicked People; as the Angel cried, *One woe is past, and another woe cometh.* So long as we provoke God, tho' sometimes we may prevail against men that are Instruments of his Wrath, we shall not always, he will have new Instruments to do his Work. It follows therefore in the last place, our only safe way is, to make our Peace with God, for if he rules and governs all, then without him all the Devils and wicked Men in the World shall do us no harm; if the Lord of Hosts be for us, all Devils and wicked (being of his Host) they cannot act but by his permission; *When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh his Enemies to be at peace with him.* When therefore we fear to suffer from wicked

men, or when we are under their hands, then we are to look up, and see God's hand in all, and to make our Peace with him. I do not speak this that we are to neglect all prudent and careful means to prevent Mischief from wicked men; as for example sake, Suppose they do injuriously take away our Estates, or assault our Lives, we are bound to use all Care, and to seek the Help of the Magistrate to preserve our selves; nay, Magistrates are bound to use all possible means to oppose those wicked men that would hurt us: God has never promis'd to help the idle, slothful, and lazy, but the diligent, and those that use all probable means in subserviency to God's Providence: nay, when God does discover the Designs of wicked men, and put into a Nations hands the means to prevent them, and they will not lay hold on them, it is a fearful sign of Destruction. Beloved, I have often thought what in such cases we ought to do; the first thing we ought to begin with, is, to look up to God above all Second Causes, and to say, when any Trouble comes, Is not the Hand of God in all this? There is indeed much Treachery, Malice, and Cruelty in Man, but is it not all order'd by a wise and holy God. The second thing is, to enquire into the cause why the Lord is angry with us; to search what Sin has gone before this Judgment; when God cuts us short of our Estates, to remember how unthankful we have been for them, and how ill we have used them. Thirdly, before we begin to deal with our Enemies, we ought first to begin with our Sins, to subdue them, and implore God's Help against them. It would be a better sign of *England's* Happiness, to see us reform our Sins, than to see all our Enemies under our Feet. *Psal.* 81.

13, 14.

If God orders and limits the Sins of wicked men, then our Duty is hearty and fervent Prayer to Almighty God; for if he sends them, he hath power to take them away. Thus penitent *Ephraim* cries, *Come, let us return to the Lord, for he hath wounded us, and he will heal us.* Thus *Jacob*, before he contended with his Brother *Esau*, he first wrestles and prevails with God in Prayer. Thus *Moses*, when *Israel* was fighting with *Amalek*, his Hands were lifted up to God in Prayer. So the good Emperor *Theodosius*, when he had laid all night prostrate on the Ground

Ground in Prayer, and had thereby overcome God, then he got an easie Victory over his Enemies. And, dearly beloved, I wish we had done so, or would do so, I am sure this is one of the best ways to prevail with God under the Circumstances we are in : There is none of you, but what are sensible of the Danger we are now in, and as to the Instruments, there has been as much Wickedness us'd as was ever known in any Nation, to contrive the Death of a King, and the Subversion of our Religion ; as to them it is without any cause at all, yet in respect of God it is most righteous ; and if He should give us up into their hands, we must say, That *God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works* : That long Peace we have abus'd to Luxury, and other Sins, God may justly take it away from us ; but above all, for our living so negligently, and being so lukewarm under that Religion God has given us, our Wickedness will justify the worst Judgments that can befall us ; but, beloved, God is merciful, and hath put some stop to the Designs of our Enemies ; and, oh that we may now return to the Lord by true and unfeigned Repentance. It is our Sins that give Strength to the *Papists* and *Jesuites* ; if we did but live up to the Religion we profess, all the *Jesuits* in *Rome* and *Devils* in *Hell* can never do us any hurt. It is not only a politic Reformation by punishing Offenders, that will do our business, or by making severer Laws, no, these are good in their kind, but the only way for us is, to be good, and walk answerable to the Gospel we profess. I have indeed thought, if God Almighty please to make a full discovery of this Plot, it will be a deadly Blow to *Jesuitism*, and to *Popery* it self, but we cannot expect it without a Reformation of our selves.

Again, if God orders all the Sins of wicked men, then 'tis a Foundation of true Patience and Comfort in all our Sufferings, to consider they all come from a holy, wise, and righteous God. Dearly beloved, I will give you one Remedy against all Discontents, Fears, and Troubles, and that is, to see God's Hand in every Affliction ; and I will shew you how to improve them. It was a true Argument the Saints used to content themselves with : so old *Eli*, when he heard the sad news of Judgment denounced against his Family, *It is the Lord*, saith he, *let him do what seemeth*

eth him good. So David, when he was under great Distresses, *I opened not my mouth, for it was thy doing.* Thus when he was reproached by Shimei, *The Lord hath sent Shimei to curse David.* Thus we find holy *Hezekiah*, when he was told of the ruine of his House and Kingdom, *Good is the word of the Lord.* So our Saviour, under his bitter agony, saith, *The cup which my heavenly father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* So *St. Chrysostom* tells us, *All the Malice and Rage of Men, when it comes into God's hand, loses its Sting.* *Plutarch* wrote against them that deny the Providence of God, and uses this Argument, That *by so doing they did take away all Comfort from People under their Affliction.* Did I believe the Affairs of this World were order'd by wicked men, and God was only a bare Spectator, I do assure you I could not live with Comfort one moment; but when I know, that in all the Confusions and Troubles which they cause here below, they cannot do one thing more than what God has order'd and appointed, I lay my self down, and rest in God's Bosom, and that for these Reasons, (1.) Because they are order'd by a God that is our Sovereign Lord, and can do with us what he pleases. (2.) Tho' we deserve it not from them, yet we have Sins that do call for it. (3.) When I consider, that notwithstanding all these Confusions, yet God can limit and over-rule all as he pleases. And lastly, when I also consider that God can make all these things end in the good of his Church, and make wicked men do his Work and his Church-service against their own wills, where then can there be any room for Discontent? When any Troubles come, that which makes them bitter, is, to consider the Wickedness of the Instruments. We are apt to say, *Oh that false Servant, that treacherous Child, if God had done this or that, it would not have troubled us.* Why beloved, look into the Text, it is not they, but God that did it, for holy and wise ends. Sudden and unexpected Accidents are great causes of Afflictions, to have a Child or Friend cut off by some unexpected Accident; yet we must consider, tho' there be such a thing as Chance or Fortune to us, there is nothing falls out but by the Wisdom of Almighty God: As *Deut. 19. 5.* compared with *Exod. 21. 13.* God suffers not a Sparrow to fall to the Ground without his Providence, much less will he do

do so by Men: all things that are Chance to us, are eternally determin'd by God. I have heard many tender-spirited persons say, Oh, I am afraid I have not done all I should in this or that matter, as *Martha* said, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, our Brother had not dyed.* But I say, when God has signified his Will by the Event, then we are to rest satisfied; God knows how to order our Ignorance and Follies to his own holy and wise ends. Again, when we think upon the Injuries of wicked men, the best Comfort is, to quiet our selves, as *David*, *The Lord has sent this Shimei to curse David.* Again, when we see a Deluge of Wickedness and Prophaneness overflow a Nation, it is one of the greatest causes of Sorrow to a good man, as it was to *David*, *Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.* It is a just cause of of Sorrow, that you are all called to at this time, but yet, beloved, we ought not to be too much grieved: God will not suffer his holy Name to be always prophaned, God can make this overspreading of Wickedness turn to the Good of the Nation: *Prov. 19. 31. The counsel of the Lord shall stand;* they cannot go one step further than God orders, and he can and will overrule them. Again, this will be of great comfort to us in all the Riddles of God's Providence, when we see holy men oppress'd, and wicked men, for a time, to prosper in all these intricate Providences; God Almighty will bring to pass his own wise and holy Ends; adore the Lord when you cannot comprehend him. The wicked have one Work to do, and God has another; judge not of Providences by their present faces and appearances: He that had seen *Joseph* afflicted, and in the Dungeon, how could he have thought that had been the way to a Throne? therefore do not judge of God's Works before you see the Effects of them: God has a Work and Purpose, and it shall be brought to pass, let men oppose and cross it as much as they can; therefore it is one of the greatest parts of Wisdom to resign up our Souls to God in the darkest Providences, when we can see neither Sun, Moon, nor Stars; *Lord, I resign up my self to thee, tho' I cannot comprehend thy design at present.* Lastly, If God works together with wicked men, and turns all their Actions contrary to their own meaning, why then we ought to work together with God. I shall shew

shew you how we may draw Good from the Sins of wicked men; when the Sins of wicked men bring me to see my own, and to watch and walk more holily with God, and more diligently seek after Heaven and Heavenly things, when the Malice of my Enemies is a means to encrease my Grace, why then, beloved, I draw Good out of Evil. Again, As to the Publick, when we see Wickedness abound, we may draw Good out of it: we may now look upon our selves to be Witnesses for God, and to live well in the midst of a wicked Nation, when we see a Deluge of Drunkenness, to abhor that Sin so much the more: So, as to the Spirit of Whoredome among us, this should make us strive to be so much the more chaste and careful against all Company that may tempt us: When we see a Spirit of Formality and Negligence in the Service of God, this should make us so much the more fervent, and to love Holiness the better: And when you see People come to such a measure of Prophaneness, as for many years together to omit the Lord's Supper, this should make us more diligent in our Preparations to it. The best way to overthrow *Popery* is, to live well, like good *Protestants*, and especially I would not have a *Protestant* tell a wilful Lye; and by this means we may turn our present Dangers to a good issue. If we thus repent, thus live, and thus pray unto God, &c.

F I N I S.

